

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylander:

All eyes were on Minneapolis this week, as former police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted for the murder of George Floyd. America's justice system may be far from perfect, but – in this case – it delivered for the victim's family.

[“Today, we are able to breathe again,”](#) said Floyd's brother, Philonise, after the verdict was announced Tuesday. The jury's decision brought a moment of personal justice to the Floyd family. It also brought a moment of relief to every Black and Brown family that has pictured their loved one as the latest victim in one of these horrific videos. But the verdict will not bring back George Floyd. Nothing will change the fact that a young girl will grow up without her father.

It is a problem that too many of us held our breath during jury deliberations because we thought there was a chance that such a crime might end with [yet another police officer being acquitted](#). Derek Chauvin's use of force was far beyond anything that should be acceptable anywhere in this country. Caught on video for the [more than nine minutes](#) Chauvin had his knee on Floyd's neck, the officer's guilt was unequivocal. The [Minneapolis police chief](#) even testified against his former officer. Still, there was doubt – not in what the officer did to George Floyd – but that the justice system might unjustly protect one of its own, again.

There were 1,127 police killings in 2020, however, [only 16 cases, or about 1.4 percent](#), resulted in charges, according to a recent study of U.S. Census data by the group Mapping Police Violence.

Too many Americans, predominantly in Black and Latino communities, have been [dying at the hands of police](#) too frequently and for too long. George Floyd did not need to die. Freddie Gray, who died six years ago this month in Baltimore, did not need to die. [Tamir Rice](#). Eric Gardner. The list can go on for pages.

As a nation, we simply must do more to ensure that the basic human rights of Americans are protected at all times, even if they are suspected of a crime. We also

must fundamentally reform our thinking and systems so that individuals are not assumed suspects because of the color of their skin or the clothes they wear. There is no rational explanation why a Black man (George Floyd) is dead after being accused of passing a counterfeit bill but a white man who commits a deadly mass shooting (too many to name them all) is escorted away in handcuffs.

Racial and religious profiling by law enforcement is morally wrong, a waste of legitimate police resources, and it can be fatal.

How many Black men and women have died at the hands of law enforcement or vigilante civilians due to the color of their skin but the incident was [not caught on video](#)? Those victims deserve justice too.

Incrementalism is no longer an option when it comes to police reform. We've been patient, but we must do better to protect the men and women and children in this country. Congress must finally pass a comprehensive plan to improve training and community relations, hold police accountable and rebuild trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

A positive starting point is the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](#) that was approved by the House of Representatives last month. The package reinvests in people and our neighborhoods by supporting critical community-based programs to change the culture of law enforcement. It empowers our communities to reimagine public safety in an equitable and just way. It focuses on three major pillars: accountability, data collection, and training policies.

Higher training standards and accountability include banning choke holds at the federal level and conditioning law enforcement funding for state and local governments on such a ban. The same for no knock warrants. It requires that deadly force be used only as a last resort and requires officers to employ de-escalation techniques first and better data collection on how and under what circumstances police officers use force. We've seen too many tragedies after the misuse of power and force by law enforcement.

The legislative package also takes important steps to demilitarize our police forces. We are a civilian society, not a military state. We can save lives by shifting to a professional mindset that moves from police as warriors to police as guardians.

I was proud that two major provisions included in the *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act* are from bills that I had introduced previously. The [End Racial and Religious Profiling Act](#) is designed to enforce the constitutional rights to equal protections under law by prohibiting racial and religious-based discriminatory profiling at all levels of law enforcement by changing the policies and procedures. It requires enhanced data collection for the DOJ to track and monitor discriminatory profiling and it holds state and local enforcement agencies

accountable by conditioning federal funds on the adoption of policies and best practices to combat profiling by officers.

The second bill I authored that is included in this legislative package is the [Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act](#). This bill takes a comprehensive approach on how local police organizations can adopt performance-based standards to ensure that instances of misconduct will be minimized through training and oversight.

Providing police with enhanced training in best practices so that they can better protect the communities they serve is one of the most pro-police things Congress can enact. Trust has been eroded and that paints a negative image for even the best of police officers. There are so many good men and women wearing a badge and patrolling the streets of Maryland and our nation, who put their lives on the line every day. Let me be clear, however, this is not about “a few bad apples.” Our justice system is failing and badly needs structural change.

The [Maryland General Assembly in Annapolis](#) recognized the need for structural reforms. It just passed legislation to promote accountability with state law enforcement officers, stiffen penalties for use of excessive force resulting in serious injury or death, expand public access to records in disciplinary cases, limit the use of no-knock warrants, create a unit in the state attorney general’s office to investigate police-involved deaths, and prohibit law enforcement from buying surplus military equipment. The General Assembly additionally voted to allow Baltimore City voters to decide whether to return control of the Baltimore Police Department from the state to the city. Now it is Congress’ turn to do the same at the federal level.

Headlines from just this week show that George Floyd was not the last victim of excessive police force. We are caught in a deadly cycle of violence and mistrust that will not end until we make the necessary changes. Congress must pass the *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act*.

I appreciate your time on this important issue.

Stay safe.



Ben Cardin